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Labouring in Vain

Subversion

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The Origins of the Labour Party.

Unlike most of its European counterparts, the British Labour Party was not created by people calling themselves 'socialists'. It was set up by the Trade Unions, to act in the interest of those unions. In fact in its early days it made no claim to being a socialist party at all. We would claim that in fact it has never been a socialist party.

To understand just why Labour has never been a socialist party, it is a good idea to go right back to its roots. The Labour Party was officially formed in 1906, but its origins really lie back in the 1850s, with the creation of the first successful trade unions in Britain.

Britain was the first capitalist society. From the earliest days of capitalism there has been a fierce struggle between the bosses and the workers. At times this struggle was industrial, with workers trying to set up types of unions (the first we know of was in the middle of the 17th century), at times it was political, with workers struggling for 'democratic rights', at times direct action was used, with workers destroying machines, blowing up factories and burning hayricks. Until the 1850s the responses of the ruling class was always the same. Brutal repression was the order of the day. Workers were sacked, imprisoned, hanged and deported.

By the 1850s the capitalist class were firmly established in control of Britain. The 1832 Reform Act (which altered the way parliament was elected) and the abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846 (which introduced free trade in food), put the old aristocracy firmly in their place. The working class political agitation for the vote had been defeated with the failure of the Chartists in 1848. The capitalists could afford to loosen up a

bit on their hold on the working class.

The 1850s saw the first ever successful setting up of Trade Unions. These weren't mass organisations of all workers. They were small tightly organised associations of skilled workers. Craftsmen in the building trades and skilled engineers were the first to get organised. These men were quite highly paid and saw themselves as a cut above their fellow workers. Some might call them an "aristocracy of labour". They saw themselves as being respectable members of society who wanted nothing to do with notions of revolution. It was this social group that was rewarded with the vote in 1867. Essentially, capitalism realised it had nothing to fear from them.

These groups were followed by other skilled workers in organising unions. They set about creating Trades Councils and the TUC. Unskilled workers were kept firmly in their place by the capitalists. When agricultural workers tried to organise they were smashed.

Politically these newly unionised and enfranchised workers saw themselves as being part of the Liberal tradition. It was to the Liberal party that they looked for help, and it was as Liberals that the first working men were elected to Parliament. In fact this tradition was so strong that even after the Labour Party was formed, a significant group of MPs were elected as Lib-Labs, that is they were Liberal MPs, but they saw themselves as Labour men. These Lib-Labs were mostly from mining constituencies in Wales.

In the 1880s the first socialist organisation in Britain was formed. This was the Democratic Federation, which was soon renamed the Social Democratic Federation. This group was never very large and failed to attract much support from the 'new' unions.

The 1880s also saw the setting up of unions for semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The first of these was formed during the Match Girls Strike against Bryant and May.
Equally significant was the Dockers Strike and the setting up of the Dockers Union.
Others soon followed. These unions, however, were firmly under the control, not of their members, but of supporters and patrons who were either members of the craft unions or were actually members of the ruling class.

It wasn't until the 1890s that significant groups of workers began to look for independent labour representation. In 1893, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was set up in Bradford. Its title explained its reason for existence. It still failed to gain much support from the existing unions. However, members of both the SDF and ILP did get themselves elected into important positions in the unions and Trades Councils.

The 1880s and 1890s were like the 1980s and 1990s in one way. They both saw the coming of a great economic crisis. That of the 1880s and 1890s was called the *Great Depression*. Faced with falling profits and declining markets, the ruling class hit back against the working class. Many were sacked, others were forced to leave their unions. The overall effect was catastrophic for the Trades Unions. This was made even worse by a series of court cases which threatened the finances of the unions. The crunch came with the Taff Vale case (in 1901) which said that employers could sue unions for the effects of a strike.

It was these court cases that persuaded the unions that they needed to get their act together politically. Faced with financial ruin, the TUC agreed to the setting up of a Labour Representation Committee in 1900. Its aim was to get

independent labour MPs elected who would change the law in the unions interests. The LRC was a coalition of unions and socialist societies - the biggest of which were the ILP and the SDF. The SDF soon left when the LRC refused to adopt the politics of class struggle.

Stabbing the Working Class in the Back

After the election of 1906 and the winning of 29 seats by the LRC, it changed its name to the Labour Party. It wasn't socialist theory which had created the party, it was the action of a group of hard headed union leaders who realised that only by winning seats in parliament could they hope to alter the legal balance against themselves. This set the tone for the party and ensured that points of principle always had to give way to expediency and horse-trading.

Even to get elected these MPs had had to do deals. In those days many constituencies had two MPs. Ten of the MPs were elected in these, where the Liberal party only put up one candidate. Sixteen of the others didn't have to put up with Liberal opposition. Only three of them had to fight for their seats against more than just a Tory. Most claimed to be devoutly religious, usually Methodist or Congregationalist, only a couple claimed to be Marxists. So the first group of Labour MPs were elected on the coat-tails of the Liberal party as a result of electoral deals and pacts. Small wonder that there was little difference between the two groups.

This group of MPs achieved little other than state payment of MPs (in 1911). Then in 1914, war broke out between Britain and Germany. The Labour Party had been part of the Second International and as such was supposed to be against war. In fact it took them just three days to decide to support the war!

For revolutionaries and socialists it is a simple principle that we oppose capitalist wars. They are always fought in capitalist interests, whether to capture new markets, to defend trade routes or to grab sources of raw materials. They are always said to be for 'freedom', 'democracy' or to defend the 'rights' of small nations. These justifications are equally always lies. These lies are used to con workers into joining up and dying while the boss class rakes in the profits. At times it can be difficult to see this. But in 1914 the issues were quite clear. Socialists in 1914 recognised this in Britain and in other countries. Almost without exception, the social democratic and labour parties rushed to support their ruling class against workers in other countries. This act clearly marked these parties as being on the side of the bosses and against workers all over the world.

The grateful capitalist class were quick to reward the Labour leaders. In May 1915, the Liberal Prime Minister, Asquith, decided that to run the war properly he needed a coalition government. Arthur Henderson , the leader of the Labour Party, joined the cabinet and two other Labour MPs got junior jobs. In return, they collaborated with the introduction of conscription and the deskilling of industry. As the war went on Labour's membership of the government increased.

This involvement in government was at a time of rising class struggle. As prices soared, food became scarce and wages failed to rise. There was an upsurge in class struggle, particularly on Clydeside. Many socialists were imprisoned for refusing to join up, speakers were beaten up and public meetings had to be cancelled. Labour's response was to fight to "Win the War", to break strikes and try to exclude from the party the influence of groups like the ILP which tended to take a more pacifist line. In 1917 their influence was broken forever by the power of the trade union bureaucrats with the

introduction of the union bloc vote.

It was in 1918 that the party adopted what it claims to be a 'socialist' constitution. This was adopted under the influence of the Russian Revolution and the upsurge of struggle that followed it all over Europe. In theory it proposed very radical sounding policies, in reality it enshrined the unions bureaucrats control of the party. The constitution for the first time allowed individual membership of the party, thus it let in all sorts of guilt ridden, privileged, public school types who hoped to run a reformed capitalism. In fact it was written by one of them, Sidney Webb.

It was this constitution that contained the famous Clause Four. This said it was the party's aim:

> *To secure for the producers by hand and brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service*

This doesn't sound too bad on paper. Now we have something to judge them against, instead of just a desire to save union funds from the courts.

The First Two Labour Governments

They soon had a chance to put their ideas into practice. In December 1923 there was a General Election. Although the Conservatives won most seats they were in a minority. Labour and the Liberals massively outnumbered them. As the second

largest party, Labour got the chance to govern. This first Labour government, led by Ramsay MacDonald, only lasted from January to November, before being replaced by the Tories again. They claimed that they were *'in office but not in power'* and so couldn't really be blamed for not having done much.

A good sign of just how much they intended to do, and how clear their attachment to socialist principles was can be seen from the following. J H Thomas, Union leader and MP, was appointed to the Colonial Office. He introduced himself to his departmental heads with the statement: 'I'm here to see there is no mucking about with the British Empire.'[1]

In February 1924 the dockers called a strike. This was opposed by the Labour government. In March the tramway workers in London came out. The railway unions proposed to come out in sympathy. MacDonald's response was to use the full force of the law on the side of the bosses. He invoked the 1920 Emergency Powers Act, this would have meant the declaration of a state of emergency if the strike had not been called off. In August the Attorney General tried to prosecute J R Campbell, the editor of the 'Communist' *Workers Weekly* , on a charge of incitement to mutiny. These actions all helped set the tone for the future.

Other notable Labour victories of this government were to go ahead with rearmament, including the building of five new cruisers, the bombing of indigenous people in Iraq and shooting strikers in India - presumably for "mucking about with the British Empire".

Just six years after adopting its so-called socialist constitution, Labour had had a chance at government. It had acted like any other capitalist party - for the bosses and against the workers.

1 quoted in **Attlee** b y Kenneth Harris, p 63

Labour got elected again in 1929. Again it was a minority government. It promised to reduce unemployment, which stood at 1,164,000. Within a year it had gone up by 750,000 to 1,911,000. In two years it had more than doubled - reaching the then record level of 2,707,000.

Faced with drain of gold from London in 1931 the government discussed ways to 'Save the Pound'. What this meant was cuts in civil service pay and unemployment benefits. The Cabinet split over this and MacDonald, the ILP member, formed a coalition with Liberals and Tories to force the measures through. The majority of the party went into opposition.

In the two years Labour had been in power, 4 million workers had had their wages reduced, including the Government's own employees.

What followed was a period in the wilderness with continued Tory government. The party came under the leadership and control of two men - Clement Attlee and Sir Stafford Cripps. Both were members of the ruling class. Attlee was the son of a solicitor who had gone to public school. During the First World War, this famous socialist and ILP member had been a Major in he army. He had tried to enlist just two days after the war started, but had been refused because he was too old. Undaunted he kept on trying and had on a number of occasions considered shooting men for cowardice.[2]

When war broke out in 1939, Labour were quick to support the British ruling class. In fact Attlee's biggest concern in the early days of September was that Chamberlain, the Tory PM,

2 Harris again, this time page 39.

wouldn't declare war on Germany.[3]

In 1940 Attlee got his reward. Labour entered into coalition with the Tories and Attlee and Greenwood got into the War Cabinet.

Attlee's first job was to introduce an Emergency Powers Bill which gave the government the power to control every aspect of life. He went on the BBC to announce that "Parliament has given to the Government full power to control all persons and property .... The direction of persons to perform services will be under the Minister of Labour, Mr Ernest Bevin." [4]

Like the First World War, the Second brought increased prices and lowered standards of living to workers. Like in the First, workers didn't just accept this. There were strikes in many industries, most notably in the mines. As Labour and the TUC were partners in the capitalists war effort, their response was simple. Strikers were saboteurs and enemies. They must return to work. Everything was to be subordinate to the war effort. Workers must wait till the war was over.

The Attlee Government

With the end of the war in Europe, July 1945 saw another General Election. This time Labour won with a huge majority. They had 393 MPs out of 640. They could do anything that they liked. They finally had the chance to really do something and put Clause Four into effect. What they did was nationalise great swathes of industry, notably coal, rail, gas, electricity, iron and steel and the Bank of England. They also introduced the National Health Service and other features of

3 Harris, again. 'Put all pressure you can on the PM. We've got to fight.' Quoted p 166

4 Harris, quoted on p 182

the Welfare State. It is upon this that most Labour members rest their claims of socialism.

Looking back we can clearly see that nationalisation has nothing to do with socialism. All it does is replace one set of bosses with another set, who work for the state. For workers the old problems remain. We still have to work for a wage or salary. We still have to pay the rent or mortgage. We still have to feed and clothe our kids. We do this while the new bosses live lives of luxury on enormous salaries. We have no control over our own lives and constantly face the prospect of the sack. All over the world, workers have rejected state capitalism.

Why did Labour nationalise all these industries? They did so mostly because they were not making profits for their bosses. After the war and the pre-war experiences of the Great Depression, British capitalism was in a bad way. Industry was crumbling and needed replacing. Industry that had been destroyed in the war needed rebuilding. If private capital remained tied up in the loss making mines and railways it could not be used to reconstruct British capitalism. The obvious answer was to nationalise. In return for their ownership of particular firms, the ruling class were given lavish compensation which could then be invested in other, more profitable industries.

A good example of this was with the nationalisation of the Bank of England. Stockholders were guaranteed the right to continue to receive a 12% dividend on their investment, even after the Bank was taken into state ownership.[5]

Workers on the other hand, according to Herbert Morrison , could only get the benefits of social insurance, "by increasing the total national income ... it could only be done by work,

[5] Is Labour Government the Way to Socialism, SPGB, 1946 p15

thought, drive and initiative." (*Times*,September 6th 1945)[6] . What this meant of course was increased productivity, greater exploitation to screw more surplus value out of the working class - in return for which a few crumbs would be thrown off the bosses table.

The "Communist", Arthur Horner, a senior NUM bureaucrat explained that he wanted, "The workers in the pits to adopt a new attitude ... Hitherto the policy of the Union had been to get what they could out of the owners. Now they had taken on the responsibility of assisting in running the industry they must accept new methods. They must take a more active part in assisting greater technical efficiency and increasing output." (*Daily Telegraph,* Sept. 7th, 1945)[7]

The Labour Party and the Unions were hand in hand with the bosses, aiming to screw more out of the working class by conning them that the promised land had arrived.

They showed just whose side they were on in the docks. Just like in 1924, Labour had to deal with a dockers strike. This was in October 1945. The strike was unofficial. Both union leaders and Labour MPs told them to go back to work. But the men, who had suffered big wage cuts after the war ended, carried on with their strike. What was Labour's response? They sent troops into the London docks to break the strike. They repeated this tactic many times in the course of their government. Indeed it is a regular feature of Labour in power that it uses troops to break strikes. It did it in the 1970s against the fire fighters, the bin men and others.

What about the NHS? Surely this was a great socialist venture? Actually it was all based on the wartime Beveridge Report. This was partly aimed at keeping workers quiet in the

[6] SPGB again, quoted on p17

[7] SPGB again, quoted on p 17

hope of avoiding upheaval after the war. It was also partly aimed at ensuring a healthier and more compliant workforce that would produce more profits for the bosses. In any case Beveridge, the great architect of the NHS, was a member of the Liberal party and his report had the broad agreement of all the main political parties. Any argument was over points of policy, not the policy itself.

What was Labour's record on the NHS in this government? They passed a law in 1949 allowing for prescription charges and in 1951 introduced charges on glasses and false teeth.

Other notable features of this Labour government were the building of the British atomic bomb and Hydrogen bomb, the rising of the cost of living by 30% and the demand that workers exercise 'restraint' and not ask for pay rises. Wartime rationing was kept in place, which ensured that money was spent not on consumption but on investment. This meant not only less for workers, but a drabber, more monotonous existence. In fact between 1947 and 1951 working class people suffered a drop in their real wages.

All in all, the great Attlee government gave little to the working class. In this it revealed once again just whose side it was on. This time its membership began more closely to reveal this fact too. In 1945 more than 40 of the Labour MPs were lawyers..... " between 20 and 30 were business men, and a good sprinkling of farmers, accountants, consulting engineers and other professions" were among the rest.[8] Arthur Greenwood, the Labour Lord Privy Seal, said at the time, "I look around among my colleagues, and I see landlords, capitalists and lawyers. We are a cross -section of the national life, and this is something that has never happened before."[9] A party originally set up to protect the unions had acquired a

[8] Manchester Guardian, 31st July 1945

[9] Hansard, 17th August 1945

constitution written by middle class intellectuals and was now being run by a coalition of union bureaucrats and traditional members of the ruling class.

Nationalisation is not, and never has been, Socialism. Socialism means the common ownership of the means of production and distribution. It means getting rid of the bosses, getting rid of working for a wage or salary, getting rid of the whole rotten buying and selling system. It means that people will freely come together to produce what is needed and will freely take from the abundant products of their labour. It will involve the abolition not only of the ruling class, but also their state. It will not mean that state being replaced by a new state. Nationalisation is just one form of state capitalism.

It is hardly surprising that the Labour Party and the unions ended up as the firmest supporters of state capitalism. Trade unions do not exist to change society. They were set up to fight over the division of the capitalist cake, not to take over the bakery. Indeed, without the buying and selling economy, based on wage labour, there is no role for a trade union. With no role for a trade union, there is no job for a union official. However, the power, privileges and status of the union bureaucrats are very much determined by how much their status is recognised by the capitalist class. To protect their position, it is natural for unions to look for a more regulated capitalism, a capitalism based on partnership between employers and labour organisations. It was to achieve this that the Labour Party was set up in the first place.

Their position was recognised and they were welcomed as junior partners in the state machine during the First World War. It was a logical step for them to go beyond mere regulation and favour full blown state ownership, with the state as the major employer working in partnership with the unions. Thus Clause Four was adopted as a means of selling this to the

working class at the same time as the Unions' control over the party was established. Their function as part of the state machine was re-emphasised during the Second World War, and continued afterwards with the various tripartite commissions, quangos like the National Economic Development Corporation, and the routine appointment of Trade Union General Secretaries to the House Of Lords.

As part of the state wanting more state control the party attracted to itself those sections of the ruling class who would benefit from it. This helps explain the number of lawyers and other professionals in the Attlee governing party. By the 1940s even the leaders of the party came from this social group.

In 1951 there was another General Election. This time Labour lost. It was followed by 13 years of Tory government. The most startling fact about this period is just how similar it was to the previous Labour administration. There was no privatisation. Municipal housing programmes increased in speed.[10] The welfare state thrived.

The Wilson Years

1964 saw the return of yet another Labour government. Again they came to power on the back of promises to the working class. It would be pointless to give a detailed account of their practice. Some high points, however, deserve mention. This period of government saw an almost continual balance of

[10] In 1953, Harold MacMillan, who was then the Conservative Minister of Housing was able to tell the House of Commons, "It is of course, very annoying and very distressing to the Opposition, whose leaders declared categorically to the nation that it was impossible to build more than 200,000 houses in a year. It is still more annoying to find that 240,000 houses were built under the first year of 'Tory misrule'". *Hansard*, 1 July 1953. Most of these were council houses.

payments crisis, accompanied by pressure on sterling and the exchange rate. To combat this, Labour put a freeze on wages, but allowed prices to keep on going up. At the same time as freezing wages, they devalued the pound - which of course meant a further falling of wages.

The working class's response to this was to increase the number of strikes and other methods of industrial struggle. Most of the most effective strikes were unofficial. The government's response was to introduce a White Paper, *In Place of Strife*, which attempted to force the unions to police their members better. The unions felt unable to do this and resisted the White Paper. It was later picked up and introduced into law by the Heath Conservative Government.

As part of their attempt to force austerity on the working class, the government introduced NHS prescription charges and the charge for dental treatment increased by half. They got rid of free school milk in secondary schools, a policy followed up by Margaret Thatcher under the Heath government. New taxes were introduced on imported goods, which made them more expensive for working class people. Even holidays were made less pleasant. Exchange controls were brought in that only allowed people to take £50 with them if they went abroad. Of course the rich soon found ways round this.

On immigration Labour took the racist path. In 1968, a racist regime in Kenya threatened to kick thousands of Asians out of Kenya. Nearly all of these held British passports. Labour's response was to pass the Commonwealth Immigrants Act which stopped most of them coming to Britain.

Throughout the sixties, the Labour government supported the USA in its war in Vietnam. This was at a time when the Americans were regularly terror bombing cities, napalming villages and massacring civilians.

Labour's foreign policy was crowned by the decision to build the Polaris submarine force. This came from the party which had adopted unilateralism as its policy at the beginning of the sixties.

Callaghan and the Social Contract

The Heath government was beaten when they tried to take on the miners. The ruling class were clearly unhappy with the idea of a three day week and showed little enthusiasm for a continuation of his rule. In 1974 there was another election and again Labour was elected. This was the start of the last period of Labour government up to today.

Once again there was a balance of payments crisis and to this was added the twin problems of unemployment and inflation. True to their past, Labour chose to tackle inflation. They did this with the Social Contract. Pay freezes backed by law had proved very unpopular, and extremely difficult to enforce faced with unofficial and wildcat strikes. Labour's alternative was a voluntary scheme which relied on the Unions to police their members. In fact the whole Social Contract idea was the scheme of left-wing union leaders, notable Jack Jones of the TGWU. So in the winter of 1975-76, inflation ran into double figures, unemployment rose to unheard of levels and workers were prevented from getting more than £6 a week extra in their pay packets. The success of this policy led to even lower pay rises the following year.

In 1976 the state of British capitalism was so severe that the government called in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to arrange a loan. They imposed severe austerity measures, which Callaghan, the new PM, was only too happy to impose. These called for cuts in public expenditure, particularly hitting

education and health. Some of the first anti-cuts demonstrations were held not against Tories, but against Labour.

When workers resisted or fought back they were subject to the full range of state sanctions. Striking fire fighters had army scabs used against them, as did refuse collectors in Scotland. Political trials were started against the British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign and their supporters who tried to get British troops to desert. In Northern Ireland they continued the policy of repression with the Prevention Of Terrorism Act and increasing the number of soldiers there.

Meanwhile, the cabinet secretly agreed to upgrade Britain's nuclear submarine force with the Chevaline missile system. This significantly increased the number of warheads carried on Polaris submarines and improved their accuracy.

In the end the working class had enough. The winter of 1978-79 saw a massive upsurge in class struggle as workers struck for wage rises to keep up with inflation. This was the so-called Winter of Discontent. The Labour Party became so unpopular that the election of that year saw the election of Thatcher's first Tory government.

In Opposition

Since 1979, Labour has been in opposition. This has not prevented it acting in the interests of the ruling class. When the Falklands War started, it was the pacifist leader of the Labour Party, Michael Foot, who gave his whole hearted support for British military action. His speech in Parliament did more to ensure that the task force was sent than anyone else. After Thatcher had finished speaking he stood up to give her his blessing. He said that the Falklands had been,"betrayed

and that the responsibility for that betrayal rests with the Government. The Government must prove by deeds that they are not responsible..." With those words he helped condemn nearly 2000 young men to their deaths.

When the miners came out on strike the Labour Party and TUC acted to isolate the strike. They insisted that other groups not come out in sympathy. They condemned mass picketing and any forms of imaginative action that broke the law.

This was repeated when the seafarers came out on strike against Townsend Thorensen. That time they told workers not to strike, but instead to travel with Sealink! Every time the working class has come up against the law, Labour have told them to give in.

Nowhere is this last statement more truly shown than over the Poll Tax. Millions refused to pay. Throughout Scotland, England and Wales, Labour was the governing party in local government. Those Labour councils have summoned millions and imprisoned hundreds for refusal or inability to pay. Bryan Gould even proudly stated in February 1992 that Labour had prosecuted more people for non-payment than the Tories. The council with the highest imprisonment record, Bolton, is a Labour council. Salford even sacked an office worker for refusing to pay. Even now as the Poll Tax is coming to its end Labour councils are looking for new and better ways to collect the millions owed in arrears.

In education, Labour have implemented the governments cuts. One particular case is the special provision for ethnic minority children and adults. Here they have happily sacked teachers and closed adult classes. Once again they have shown how happy they are to play the racist card.

Can Labour be Changed?

In office and out, Labour is a party for capitalism. It is a party that has regularly and routinely acted against the working class. Yet we are constantly told not to give up hope. Every time an election comes round the different left wing groups tell us to vote Labour. Can Labour be changed? We think that its history proves the impossibility of changing Labour.

We are often told by the left that Labour must be supported because it is a working class party. Our reply is that although it may have working class members, that does not make it a working class organisation. We think that the history we have outlined in this pamphlet shows quite clearly that Labour has never acted for the working class. Labour was set up by the Trade Unions to act in their interests, which is not the same thing as being set up by the working class. The Unions may once have been working class organisations. Now they are junior partners in the state machine whose job is to manage the buying and selling of labour power. They may no longer be as influential as they were in the 1970s but their influence remains. All over the country (and indeed the world) unions and their representatives are engaged in the day to day process of ensuring that production carries on smoothly. Employers value the contribution that union representatives make and go so far as to give them time off work for union activities, provide them with offices, seek their advice and assist their attending union training courses. The influence of the unions on the Labour Party is not as great as it was. But they continue to provide most of Labour's funds. The old adage holds true, 'whoever pays the piper calls the tune.'

The trouble with Labour is that many thousands of working class people belong to it and millions still support it. Faced with the awful reality that is capitalism they want to do

something about it. Clearly the solution needs to be at least partly a political one, so they look for a party which seems to offer change. Labour are most able to offer this because they are usually a party of opposition nationally. Being out of office so frequently they can always claim that next time things will be different. However, things never can be different.

Labour long ago gave up any pretence at wanting to get rid of capitalism. Equally they have got rid of any notion of nationalising large parts of it. Now they claim that they will make it operate more fairly. This is impossible. Capitalism is based on the making of commodities (things to buy and sell) and on the exploitation of labour. When we say this we mean that people who work receive less than they produce, the surplus going to the bosses, whether private or state. Capitalism needs competition to work properly and this means that the bosses must try to keep prices as low as possible. This in turn means they have to get workers to make as much as possible for as little as possible. That is why we are constantly being told to work harder and make more.[11] With increasing regularity capitalism is thrown into crisis by this very competitive drive, millions of workers are thrown out of work and others have their wages or benefits cut. This is the reality of the society we live in. Politicians who try to ignore this are soon brought to account by Stock Market crashes, galloping inflation, flights of currency and capital, currency crises and more. Then they have to return to capitalist normality. This has been the fate for left wing governments the world over, and as we have seen has forced various Labour

11 Productivity deals don't always benefit even those workers who don't lose their jobs through them.
Some figures for the USA illustrate the point well. US workers are the world's most productive. Since 1969 the equivalent of an extra month has been added to the work of the average US worker. Yet average weekly wages (allowing for inflation) have dropped by 17.6% since 1972! This information comes from The People, March 21, 1992. Published by the Socialist Labour Party.

governments to viciously attack working class living standards.

It is this reality which has turned every so-called 'left' leader into a 'traitor'. Ramsay MacDonald and Clement Attlee were members of the ILP. Harold Wilson was a left winger who left Attlee's government over charges for NHS glasses and dentures[12] Kinnock was a well known left winger in the 1970s and indeed rose to power on the back of his reputation. Left wing Labour councils have been forced to introduce enormous rate bills and Poll Tax bills and when Militant controlled Liverpool they were forced to sack thousands of workers.

Groups like the SWP say that they know that Labour is rotten. Yet come every election they demand that we all troop out and dutifully "Vote Labour". They qualify this by saying we should do it "without illusions." They do this for a number of reasons. One is that despite all their talk, many SWP members and readers of *Socialist Worker* still do have illusions in Labour. To be open and tell workers not to be conned would risk alienating a lot of support. As the SWP leadership prefer masses of followers to conscious revolutionaries, they have no problem making the choice of saying Vote Labour. Another reason is more sinister. The SWP leadership know what Labour is. However, for all their fine talk, they do not believe that the working class is capable of making a revolution itself. They believe it has to be led to what they call 'socialism' by an elite of professional revolutionaries. Part of this process, as they see it, is that the working class has to go through a whole host of 'experiences' before it will turn to the SWP for leadership. One of these steps is 'going through the experience of a Labour government'. They think that this will teach workers that Labour is rotten. They say this time and time again, even though we have experienced Labour in

12 As we have seen, when he became Prime Minister, Wilson went one better. He introduced charges for prescriptions too!

power nationally before and continue to experience it locally today! This attitude reveals the contempt that the has for working class people and their ability to change society. It also means that they end up as little more than a far left electoral fig leaf for Labour, fostering all the illusions they claim they want to get rid of.

Other left wing groups share this view to a greater or lesser extent. Some hold the view that a return of Labour would mean more chance for class struggle. This rests on the illusion that Labour is basically on the side of the workers and anyway ignores the reality that Labour is usually elected at times of rising class struggle - but is elected with the purpose of containing that struggle!

The time has come to give up on the pretence and ditch any hopes that remain for Labour. To successfully change society the working class will have to do away with all capitalist parties and institutions. This inevitably means that they will have to do away with the Labour Party and its left wing hangers-on as part of the process.

Is there an alternative?

All the lies, cheating and manipulation of Labour and its left wing hangers on would be laughable if the issues at stake weren't so vital. The fact is that capitalism is a disgusting social system. This century over 115 million people have been killed in capitalism's wars and countless hundreds of millions more have died from preventable disease, starvation and poverty. This toll of human life and misery has had the sole purpose of keeping a tiny minority of the population in wealth and privilege. It is towards the maintenance of this

system that all of Labour's efforts have gone. Experience has shown that for all their fine talk of wanting to make the system fairer, that the system has ended up changing them.

All the time Labour and their friends in other countries have been tring to run capitalism there has been another struggle going on. This has been the class struggle between the world's rich and the world's working class. This struggle has taken many forms. In Britain we've seen strikes small and large, we saw the fight against the Poll Tax, we've seen the riots of the early eighties; we see fights against the state's plans for the places we live and the schools we send our kids to. We've seen massive struggles in other countries, like in Poland in 1981, like in South Africa even now (despite the attempts of the ANC to sidetrack the struggle into constitutionalism). What links these struggles the world over is the way that working people are fighting to improve their living standards, the way working class people are trying to get some control over their own lives away from capital.

What we need to do is to link up these struggles, to build a community of resistance, a community that will take the struggle forward to a fight against the whole of capitalism and its state. It is here that revolutionary groups like Subversion have a role to play. We exist to spread information about struggles, to show where they link up, to show that they inevitably lead to a struggle not just against capitalism, but for communism. As we said in the pamphlet, communism, or socialism, means the common ownership of the means of production and distribution. It means getting rid of the bosses, getting rid of working for a wage or salary, getting rid of the whole rotten buying and selling system. It means that people will freely come together to produce what is needed and will freely take from the abundant products of their labour. It will involve the abolition not only of the ruling class, but also their state.

We exist not as something separate from the working class, not as some leadership for others to follow, but as part of the class working for our own liberation. If you agree with what we have to say and want to be part of the struggle, why not join with us to hasten the day of capitalism's destruction?

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What We Stand For

We meet regularly for political discussion and to organise our activities. The following is a brief description of our basic political principles:

- We are against all forms of capitalism: private, state and self-managed.

- We are for communism, which is a classless society in which all goods are distributed according to needs and desires.

- We are actively opposed to all ideologies which divide the working class, such as religion, sexism and racism.

- We are against all expressions of nationalism, including "national liberation" movements such as the IRA.

- The working class (wage labourers, the unemployed, housewives, etc.), is the revolutionary class; only its struggle can liberate humanity from scarcity, war and economic crisis.

- Trade unions are part of the capitalist system, selling our labour power to the bosses and sabotaging our struggles. We support independent working class struggle, in all areas of life under capitalism, outside the control of the trade unions and all political parties.

- We totally oppose all capitalist parties, including the Labour Party and other organisations of the capitalist left. We are against participation in fronts with these organisations.

- We are against participation in parliamentary elections; we are for the smashing of the capitalist state by the working class and the establishment of organisations of working class power.

- We are against sectarianism, and support principled co-operation among revolutionaries.

- We exist to actively participate in escalating the class war towards communism.